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U.S. Urging a 'Credible' Philippine Vote

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 4 — The Reagan Administration today called on President Ferdinand E. Marcos to conduct the proposed early presidential elections in the Philippines in a "credible and fair" fashion, with "broadly based" citizen participation.

Officials said today that the Administration statements were designed to convey its concern that the quality of the elections be such that they not backfire and prompt widening unrest in the Philippines instead of increased democracy.

In raising that possibility, the officials and some Congressional experts said they were concerned that Mr. Marcos was seeking the elections before the opposition could adequately unite and mobilize to conduct a campaign.

'A Silly Claim'

Mr. Marcos said Sunday that he intended to call for an election to settle what he called "a silly claim" that his Government is inept. He said the election would be held on Jan. 17, the anniversary of the lifting of martial law in 1981.

The announcement, which Mr. Marcos made on the ABC News program "This Week," caught the Administration by surprise, officials said.

An aide to Senator Paul Laxalt, Republican of Nevada, said the Senator was in a visit to Manila on behalf of Mr. Reagan two weeks ago that Mr. Marcos would adhere to a schedule that called for local elections in May 1986 and presidential elections a year later.

At that time, according to the official, Mr. Marcos said moving up the timetable would be too costly and would detract from plans to improve the country's economic situation.

Although the Administration greeted Mr. Marcos's change of plans with caution, officials said it was important that the elections have credibility to prevent any widening of internal strife.

"Elections in the Philippines must be based on credible, fair and broadly based in terms of participation," said Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman.

Concern About Credibility

Similarly, Charles E. Redman, a State Department spokesman, said the chief concern of the United States was not when the elections would be held, but whether they would be credible.

"Whenever elections are held, our concern is that they be free and fair," he said. "If elections are to re-establish competence, as President Marcos has stated, then it is essential that they be credible to the Philippine people, including satisfactory answers to constitutional questions."

Mr. Redman said confidence in the electoral process required that the Philippine military conduct itself "in a professional manner during such elections."

"Additionally," he said, "a fair election law, a truly impartial commission on elections and an accredited, independent citizen's election monitoring organization are essential."

Last week, a report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence concluded that opposition parties would be at a disadvantage under a "snap" election because it could have difficulty lining up behind a candidate. Although the opposition to Mr. Marcos was significant, the report said, it remained questionable if it could "unite behind one major presidential candidate when the chips are down."

Representative Stephen J. Solarz, Democrat of Brooklyn, the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, said the election carried the potential of further "polarizing" the situation in the Philippines.

"If the election is free and fair," he said, "it could reverse the drift toward Communism. But if it is not genuinely honest, it could very easily boomerang. This is a very high stakes game."

The aide to Mr. Laxalt said the Senator regarded the Marcos announcement as "an exciting and positive development."

The aide said that in a meeting between Mr. Laxalt and Mr. Marcos two weeks ago in Manila, the Philippine President ruled out any possibility of an early election. But he said Mr. Marcos had discussed such a move in a telephone conversation with Mr. Laxalt on Friday.